

Baird, Murray, Cantwell Urge Interior To Take Over Vancouver Barracks-Lawmakers' Request Comes in Wake of Today's BRAC Vote- (August 24, 2005)

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Brian Baird, Senator Patty Murray, and Senator Maria Cantwell today urged the National Park Service and Department of Interior to accept ownership of the East and South Vancouver Barracks should they become available through the BRAC process. The three lawmakers requested the ownership transfer in the following letter addressed to Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton:

August 24, 2005

Gale Norton

Secretary of the Interior

Department of the Interior

Dear Secretary Norton:

The Vancouver National Historic Reserve was created by Congress in 1996 in recognition of the tremendous cultural and historic assets located within the 366-acre site. The significance of this site was such that Congress designated two federal agencies, the US Army and the National Park Service as official Partners, along with the City of Vancouver and the State of Washington.

Since the creation of the Reserve the Partners, working in conjunction with the Vancouver National Historic Reserve Trust, the official non-profit organization for the Reserve, have collectively invested almost \$24 million dollars into the development of the Historic Reserve to create one of the premier historic and cultural sites in the United States. Fort Vancouver National Historic Site currently draws over 500,000 visitors per year from across the country and around the world. Other Reserve venues, including the Pearson Air Museum, Officers Row, the Water Resources Education Center and the Columbia River waterfront provide a rich cultural and educational experience for visitors in addition to a significant economic benefit for our region.

Recently, the Confluence Project with artwork by internationally renowned artist Maya Lin has chosen the Vancouver National Historic Reserve as one of their major sites. A 40½-foot wide land bridge has been designed to link the major part of the Vancouver National Historic Reserve with the waterfront of the Columbia River. A combination of private funding, Washington State Capital funding and federal transportation dollars totaling \$10 million dollars promises to make the land bridge a significant attraction for visitors as well as a major transportation link for the Reserve.

In addition, almost a billion dollars of private and public funding has been invested in the vicinity of the Historic Reserve in the last 15 years. In the last month, a significant piece of the Columbia River waterfront close to the Reserve has opened up for redevelopment with the expectation that close to a hundred million dollars will be invested in that area. While the Historic Reserve benefits significantly from this community investment, the development of the Reserve as a tourism destination also plays a role in encouraging further community investment.

The Historic Reserve now has a significant opportunity that will allow for expansion of public use and bring additional visitors and economic benefit to Southwest Washington and beyond. The East and South Vancouver Barracks, currently occupied by the Army Reserve and Washington National Guard, are on the proposed Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) list. The BRAC process would allow the ownership of the East and South Barracks, which has been within the authorized boundaries of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site for nearly 50 years, to transfer to the National Park Service, if the Department of the Interior agrees to accept the property.

The East and South Vancouver Barracks are located in the middle of the Historic Reserve and contain a number of nationally significant buildings and cultural resources, including the Hudson's Bay Company Village and Cemetery where members of 37 different Native American tribes are buried. National Park Service ownership of the property will allow the Reserve Partners to continue to work cooperatively to ensure successful redevelopment efforts.

This opportunity is a critical juncture for the future of the Vancouver National Historic Reserve. The City of Vancouver, the State of Washington, the Vancouver National Historic Reserve Trust, and the community at large have long anticipated that the National Park Service would accept responsibility for the East and South Barracks since these areas are within the park's legislative boundaries. We urge the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior to accept ownership of the East and South Barracks should they become available through the BRAC process or other mechanisms.

Sincerely,

Patty Murray

U.S. Senator

Maria Cantwell

U.S. Senator

Brian Baird

U.S. Representative

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